The Army as a Bureaucracy: Japanese Militarism Revisited

Shin'ichi Kitaoka

MODERN military institutions are huge bureaucracies. They are characterized by rules (laws, administrative orders, etc.), jurisdictions, and hierarchies. They base appointments and promotions on objective standards such as examinations, educational certificates, and length of service. They use documents in the performance of their administrative functions; they encourage personnel to learn the technical details of their profession. But precedent determines most of their procedures and actions.[1]

Military bureaucracies differ from civil bureaucracies in at least two ways, however. First, because national security and human lives are at stake, military rules, orders, jurisdictions, and hierarchies are stricter. On the other hand, because of the same reason, these bureaucracies may be allowed to neglect rules, orders, etc., in cases of emergency. In other words, military bureaucracies are usually much stricter and yet can sometimes be much more flexible than their civil counterparts. If the military lacks a well-organized bureaucracy, it will not work effectively; and if it has a too well-organized bureaucracy, it will suffocate the imaginative talents that might be needed to face the unpredictable in battle.

A further difference between military and civil bureaucracies may be seen in their respective relations to politics. In both civil and

Japanese surnames come first and given names last. For Japanese authors and editors the order is reversed in these notes.

1. On the characteristics of bureaucracy and the bureaucratization of the military, Max Weber's classical account is still relevant. See Hans H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills, eds., *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1958), ch. 8.

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